

# 1

T amborel slid aside the saba lattice and edged out. under the shadow of that low stone entrance arch he eyed the knot of women by the garden gate. Eleyna was no gossip, yet there she'd stood all morning, barring his flight with the older boys over the ripening grainfields and on to glory at the minnow brook. Something was up, and it was bad, Tamborel knew it. Else why did his mother look so grim and why was her back so straight? And why was he kept inside on such a fine day? Had he done something wrong? Tamborel rehearsed all that had been said and done that morning, from the moment he got up to the time Hwylum, his pappa, left for the grainfields. And then on till he was sent to wash his face. No, Eleyna had seemed happy with him. So what was it, then? Tamborel raked his fingers through his tawny curls, thinking hard. As he was at the washbowl, someone had called Eleyna to the saba lattice. He remembered now the hurried, hushed exchange, and yes, *that* was when she'd told him to stay put.

He inched his bare feet forward until the sunlight on the worn stone step dubbed his big toenail. Still his mother did not turn her head. To have gotten so far undetected! There was no doubting now the direness of the occasion. The women were gazing up the street toward the village boundary, where the road began that led west to Pridicum, the neighboring village.

Were they expecting someone? Tamborel craned on tiptoe, but he was way too small to see over the garden wall.

Above each woman, the modest clusters of their heynim, tiny golden chiming spheres, danced and swirled like sun-bugs with each nod and shake of the head. He tuned his ears toward the high, melodic tinkling and breathed out, his worry unraveling slightly under their influence, even though the harmonies were purely accidental.

Only three folk in Fahwyll could alter their spheres' pitch to tune them to a true harmony. Only three had enough mind-power to snag and hold more than a handful of heynim; to create measured harmonies and put them to use. One was Yornwey the zjarn, who tuned her faleyn to heal a body's ill. The others were Throm and Bennoc, who tuned their faleyn in the fields at sowing and harvest: Throm, to the soil to encourage the crops; Bennoc, to the skies to bring fair weather. This trio held the biggest clusters in Fahwyll—almost two handfuls of heynim each. No others in the village could hold more than a half-dozen of the golden spheres, let alone control their chiming. Not even Tamborel's own mamma and pappa, as he found when he was old enough to ask. "Sorry, but we're not able," Eleyna had answered, with a shake of her head that had set her little cluster a-bob and a-jingle.

"How can you be sure?"

"To tune a faleyn you need greater power than ours."

"Like the power Yornwey has, and Bennoc, and Throm? Is that why they're so important, Mamma?"

"Aye. We depend on faleyn for our lives—as you well know, Tam'shu."

He did indeed. Weren't the measured chimes such a vital part of life that the very world was named for them? *Alyafaleyn*, or Region of Harmonies. And weren't those who tuned them held in the highest esteem? Tamborel longed to be grown up and holding his own cluster, doing important work alongside Yornwey, and Bennoc, and Throm. "Are they the greatest folk in the world?"

Eleyna had found this amusing, though he'd been quite serious. "In Fahwyll, at any rate. But they say that folk in Minavar trail swarms the length of our front path. Think how their faleyn would sound, Tam'shu."

Tamborel stole out from under the saba's shadow, scuffing his toe in the dusty garden path, drawn irresistibly toward the front gate by conflicting

desires: to stay and learn what was going on and to slip off to the minnow brook. He pictured the older boys, their feet in the cool, swift currents, their stone crocks steely with minnows by now. He sidled on toward the gate, and had almost reached it when at last Eleyna noticed him. Frowning, she waved him back. "Inside, Tam'shu. I said you'll not go out today."

"But, Mamma, I want to be with Meynoc!" Meynoc, biggest of all the village boys. Good-natured Meynoc, who always suffered his company when the other boys ordered him away.

"Meynoc stays home, too. Now go inside and be a good boy."

Tamborel retreated under the saba's shadow. Meynoc was indoors also? Hard to believe, but Eleyna always told the truth. During the last monsoons when he'd been taken with the moldy fever, she'd told him how truly bad it was, even after Hwyllym said that she should not. How Mistress Bider the herb wife had no remedy strong enough to break his fever. How they must call in Yornwey the zjarn. How Yornwey must tune her faleyn to his sickness, and how he must be a big boy, and bend his mind to help. Eleyna had frightened him, but, glad of the truth, he'd tried hard, fixing his ear on Yornwey's tinkling chimes. He'd slept, and awakened with the fever down, and his lungs clear.

A stray heyn floated past the saba, a tiny golden bubble almost within reach. A heyn still free, Unsnagged, so long past the rains? In the days following the hard monsoons, the clear skies sparkled with them—fresh new ones, Eleyna said, although she couldn't say exactly where they came from, or why. Most were snagged over the city of Minavar. A few made it further east to Pridicum, the neighboring village. Of those, some very few, riding high, escaped to drift out Fahwyll-way. Had this one been tangled in a tree? Or caught in a rock cleft? Perhaps the wind had shaken it loose again, or a bird had dislodged it, maybe. Tamborel grabbed for it then hastily clasped his hands behind his back. What a baby, reaching for it physically! Embarrassed, he glanced to the women at the gate. To his relief, they had not noticed.

The heyn had floated on, its tantalizing notes receding on the breeze. Tamborel tried to fix his mind on it, to will it to him the way the big folk did, but without success. Wistfully, he watched it go, curving in a high arc, then dancing away over the low, flat rooftops on the gentle winds. He sighed, wish-

ing he were old enough to snag a heyn and bind it to his mind with firm and steady purpose. But at five, he had a long wait. Even Meynoc, nearly thirteen years come harvest time had shown no signs of snagging yet.

As the dwindling sphere winked off into the blue, Tamborel's attention pricked. Over the women's mutter, and the tinkling of their heynim, he now heard new tones: stronger than Yornwey's, or Bennoc's, or Throm's, and deeper. In mounting excitement, he leaned out from under the saba's shadow, straining to hear. A stranger was approaching, bringing harmonies from outside!

As the chimes drew nearer, the watching women exclaimed, then fell quiet. Tamborel craned on tiptoe, striving vainly to peer over the garden wall. Oh, if only he were taller.

Tamborel ran to fetch a chair and climbed atop it. Now he could see all right, over the garden wall and along the street. Squeezing up his eyes against the noon glare, he made out two shapes stark against the Pridicum road. One was Meynoc's father, Bombrul, who should be in the grainfields at this hour. Beside him strode a stocky man of middle size and height: nothing remarkable about him—except that above his head swarmed the biggest golden cluster that Tamborel had ever seen. More: in among the tiny spheres swirled larger ones, sounding the deeper notes that he had heard. As the man strode past with Bombrul, Tamborel tried to count those bigger spheres, but there were too many, more than he had fingers, at any rate. Bending to the heynim's influence, he let go, remembering to breathe. Those larger spheres, Tamborel had never seen the like. No one in Fahwyll had such, not even Yornwey, or Bennoc, or Throm. Were the larger heynim more powerful than the little ones? he wondered. Did they do things the little ones could not? He longed to ask Eleyna these things, and also who the man was and why Meynoc's father had brought him to Fahwyll, but he dared not, for fear that Eleyna would banish him back inside.

The foreigner was past, and his golden heyn-cloud. The wondrous music faded in the distance. On a calculated risk, Tamborel scrambled down off the chair and ran to stand behind Eleyna, peering out.

"So that's Casinder," muttered Mistress Bider. "Bombrul must've run all the way to Pridicum to be fetching him so quick. Looks fair beat, poor man. And so

he would, not being our best runner.” The woman glanced to Eleyna. Everyone knew Hwylum had the fastest legs and stoutest windpipe in the village.

“Serve him right,” Mother Turner said. “He should’ve sent Hwylum.”

“The zjarn doesn’t look the least bit winded,” observed Mistress Bewly. “The way they boast about that man in Pridicum. No one can be that good. Though he does trail a bigger cluster than Yornwey’s, I must admit.”

Mother Turner nodded. “Let’s hope it’s more powerful, too. Rufina won’t see the day out, else.”

Tamborel’s ears pricked. Rufina? Meynoc’s mother, Bombrul’s wife. She was ill? Is that why Bombrul had fetched Casinder? Why Meynoc had not come out to play? “Rufina must be *very* ill,” he murmured anxiously.

Eleyna turned her head. “Just look at the bad boy!” she cried. “Go on in with you. There’s no more here to see.”

“But,” wailed Tamborel, as his mother hustled him under the saba, pulling the lattice across, shutting them both inside. “Will Rufina die?”

Eleyna threw up her hands. “Hark at you!” she scolded. “What gives you such an idea! Did you not see Casinder just now? Did you not see his great cluster? He and Yornwey are going to tune their faleyn in augmentation so of course Rufina will be healed! Here, come away from that lattice and help me clean these bimberries. I’ve a pie to bake for tea!”

All afternoon, Tamborel longed to slip out to Meynoc’s house, to hear the two zjarns tuning their faleyn together, in *augmentation* as his mother had called it. But Eleyna had not only closed the saba lattice. She had also latched all the saraba shutters, making the house dusky dark. Outside, the sun turned down, a dry breeze blew through the shutter slats. Men passed in the street, returning from the fields. His father came in, subdued and disinclined to speak.

As Tamborel sat with his parents at supper, a neighbor called at their saba lattice. Tamborel jumped down to open it, but Eleyna barred his way. “Wait here, my lad,” she said, and went out.

Presently she returned, looking grave.

“Who was it?” Tamborel burst out.

Eleyna only shook her head, exchanging looks with Hwylum. After supper, the two of them went to stand under the saba, and closed the lattice behind them. Tamborel watched them speaking with their heads close,

watched their heynim intermingling as was the way with family folk. Though they spoke low and kept their faces turned from him, Tamborel's keen ears caught enough. Rufina was no better. The two zjarns barely held her flame within its cup: if something were not done, and soon, Meynoc's mamma would die.